

China: Opportunity and challenge for the US
Political and strategic issues

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Fundamental question about China for the US

- What are China's goals?

Several possible answers:

Status quo – its primary goal is domestic stability/growth →
Positive sum economic game, politically marginal player in the
international system

Hegemony – It wants to dominate Asia → New Cold War

Stakeholder – It wants a growing influence in the
international system but accepts most of its rules →
Stakeholder

China as a status-quo power

- Assumption: Chinese leadership's overriding concern is domestic stability/survival
- Implications for US policy:
As long as China's interests are not threatened, Beijing will favor passivity in international affairs
The US-Japan alliance should not look like a menace to China

China as expansionist power

- Assumption: China wants to be a regional hegemon, kick the US out of Asia.

- Implications for US policy:

Strengthen the Japan-US Alliance to deter China

Contain China with other regional alliances (India, Vietnam, Mongolia, Central Asia, Russia, (North? and South) Korea, Taiwan, Australia, SE Asia)

China as a major stakeholder

- Assumption: China wants a role in shaping the international system but wishes to cooperate with the US
 - Implications for US policy:
 - Develop mechanisms to include China in decision making, satisfy its ambitions to be treated as a major player (G8), develop bilateral and multilateral mechanisms
 - Include Japan in the process
- Big question:** How much of the current international systems does it accept? How much change does it want?

Critical issues

- Taiwan
- Domestic stability in China

Taiwan

- Objectively, China does not need Taiwan (nor Tibet or Xinjiang), countries that got rid of their colonial mentality and holdings are better off
- By now Beijing is stuck with its “Taiwan is China” claim as the majority of Chinese seem to support it. Looking weak could fuel anti-government agitation.
- (Nearly) impossible for US to abandon Taiwan for ideological reasons and strategic ones.
- Status quo could last “forever” but a war is not impossible → US needs deterrence power

Domestic stability

- So far China has defied gravity, remained stable despite dramatic domestic transformation.
- “Past performance is no guarantee of future performance”
- What would a post-CCP China look like?
Impossible to predict

Questions for Japan

- Could a peaceful China replace Japan as the key US partner in Asia?
- How does Japan fit in the stakeholder model?
- What is Japan role in US deterrence policy against China?
- How autonomous is Japan's China policy?
- Can Japan "handle" China if the US fails to perform its stabilizing role in Asia?

Conclusion

- China's power is generally overstated. The country faces daunting domestic challenges, even under a worst-case scenario is it not the new Soviet Union
- US ability to affect Chinese domestic developments is limited
- We know what Japan will be in 10 years, we have no idea what China will be in a decade
- A stakeholder model combined with the necessary deterrence to defend US interests is the logical combination